A parent and carer's guide to social media

'Social media' refers to the online platforms and apps that people use to create social networks, share media content, chat, message and connect with others. Social media can play a big part in the digital lives of children and young people – and there are both risks and benefits to being connected on social media.

Recently there has been a lot of news coverage about social media companies like Facebook and Twitter. Much of that coverage has focused on the challenges that social media may present, as well as the drive from central government towards regulation. You may have read about 'trolling' – where people post inflammatory or upsetting messages designed to evoke anger or upset people. Or, about companies using people's personal data posted on social media without their consent.

Understanding what is happening on social media networks and how to best guide your child/children on using them may feel daunting. But while much of the news has focused on the negative aspects of social media, there are plenty of positives too.

This guide explains some of the risks and benefits of using social media networks and how to help children and young people use them in a positive way.
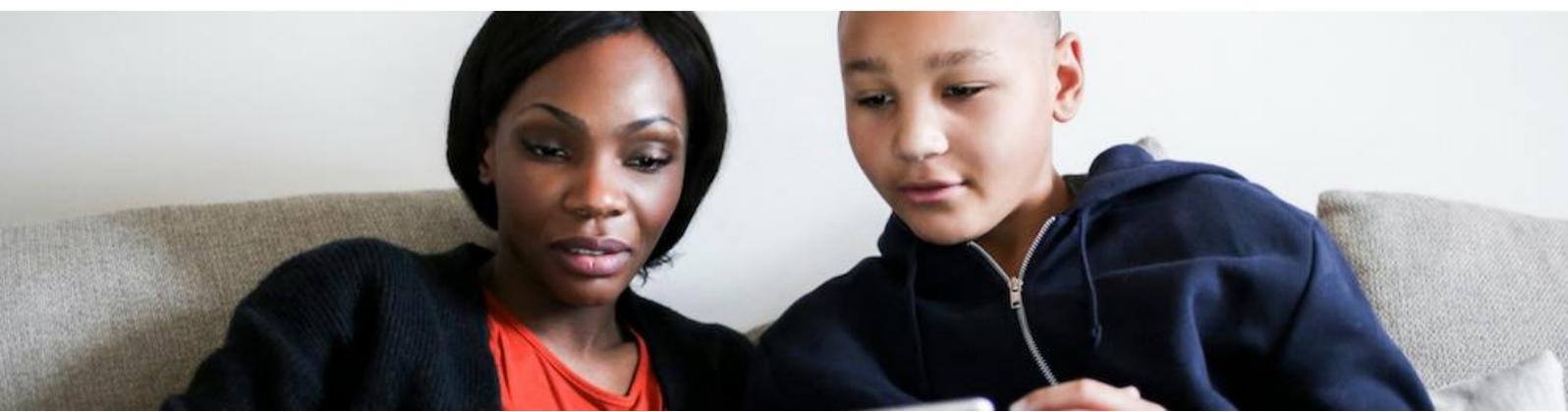
What are the benefits of using social media?
Creating social networks and responsibly engaging online can allow your child to:
- create and maintain friendships and share interests with others
- be creative and have fun while uploading and sharing content
- feel a sense of connection with others in local, national or international communities
- positively explore self-expression and self-identity via different platforms
- further develop the knowledge and skills they need to responsibly navigate social media.

What are the risks when using social media?
- Underage children and young people can sign up for social media accounts, breaching provider terms and conditions. This can lead to their data and private information being collected by social media platforms and advertisers.
- Younger children do not always have the maturity to deal with online issues.
- Children and young people may be exposed to inappropriate content.
- Younger children may falsify their age and risk blurring lines between honesty and truthfulness, online and offline.
- Some adults may use social media in an attempt to groom children and young people.

Where can parents/carers find helpful resources on social media?
- **Social media sites.** Social media companies now provide safety centres and parent/carer guides on their platforms with instructions, tips and resources. These offer accessible resources for children and young people, too. The UK Safer Internet Centre has a list of relevant support pages on their site.

- **Hwb.** The UK Safer Internet Centre has created social media checklists which are available bilingually on Hwb. These checklists are easy to read and provide tips and guidance on how to use safety and privacy features. The UK Safer Internet Centre has additional information for parents and carers available on their website.

- **Gaming sites.** Many online games also provide 'social media' features, for example, the ability to chat and message other players within the game. Parents and carers can find safety centres and parent/carer guides on many online gaming sites as well.

Conversation starters for engaging with your children about social media
1. What's your favourite social media app?
2. What do you like best about it?
3. What's your favourite app for messaging? Making video calls?
4. What do you think is okay to share online?
5. What do you think you should never share online?
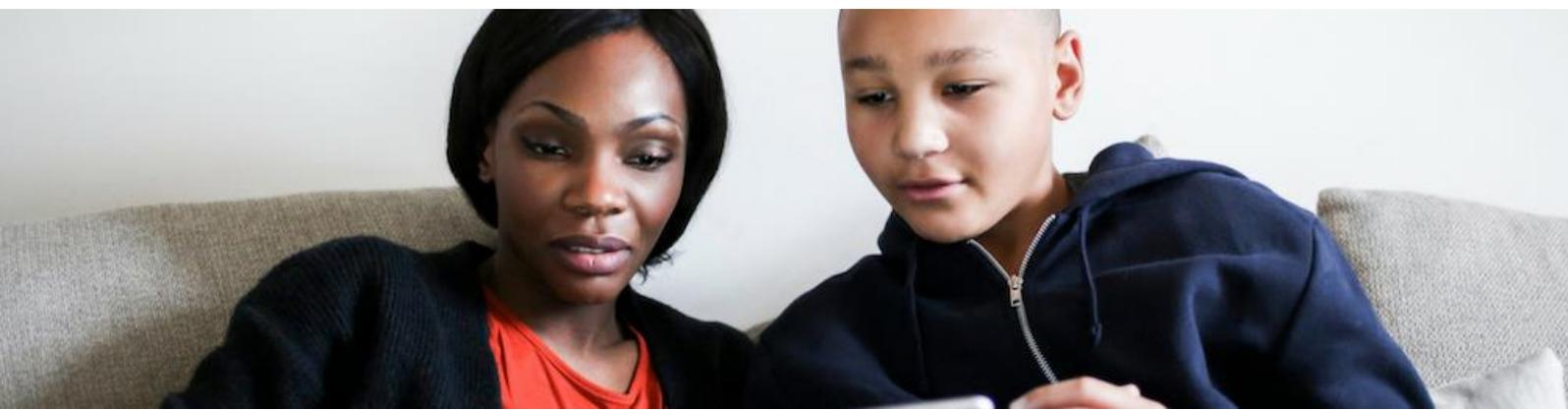
6. Do you know that future schools or employers may be able to see your social media accounts?
7. Do you know how to turn off your location so people can't see where you are?
8. Can you think of ways to use your social media account for good?
9. Do you know how to block/report someone online?
10. Do you know how to maintain a good digital reputation?

For more conversation starter ideas, please visit Childnet International.

The Online Safety Zone also contains parent and carer guides on other issues related to social media.